

STUDENT POWER: SOLE's Occupation of the U-M President's Office

A year ago U-M students were educating their peers about Nike's human rights abuses. Now the movement has broadened to address the larger problem of all sweatshop labor.

In sweatshops workers are routinely paid below the minimum wage, and are often not making enough to live on. Forced overtime is commonplace, as workers are often required to work from

60 to 80 hours per week. The factory conditions are unsafe. Physical abuse of workers for minor infractions occur. Independent labor unions or other worker organizations are discouraged, and many workers have been fired, beaten and jailed for organizing activities. Independent monitoring of these factories by qualified outside observers is forbidden. These are sweatshop conditions, and

workers across the world risk their employment and their lives by going on strike and struggling against these abuses on a day-to-day basis.

Employment turnover is high, but jobs are scarce, so many women are forced to take these jobs to avoid starvation.

The workers overseas inspire us with their commitment to fight for better working conditions.

Here at Michigan and at dozens of other universities across the country, we are working to help them.

Michigan should expect and demand the best behavior from its corporate partners, rather than submit to the so-called realities of the global sweatshop marketplace.

Student Power

The president's office is ours.
We lie shoulder to shoulder so that every inch of the floor between the door and the inside of the office is covered.
We clap and chant, "Hey, hey! Ho, ho! Sweatshop labor's got to go!" when one of the men in suits opens the door.
The man wears a silly grin as he steps out into our sea of bodies.
"Excuse me, sir, you're stepping on me," says someone at my side.
The man looks down and the grin disappears. Silently he turns back.
The president's office is ours.

It's an issue of integrity, of trust, and of power.

When I and twenty-nine other University students occupied the President's office to demand the humane treatment of the workers who make U of M apparel, we were pleasantly surprised to hear that President Bollinger supported our actions. He said the University community should admire our passion and leadership on the issue of sweatshop labor.

Bollinger didn't ask D.P.S. to haul us off to jail, he didn't ban the media from coming to his office to speak with students, he didn't even lock the door to the second-floor bathroom. Wow! Finally, a student's administrator; a man certainly deserving of the praise and admiration heaped upon him by the student body and local media. DON'T BELIEVE THE HYPE! I don't want to be the bearer of bad news, but President Bollinger smacked this university with a public-relations campaign the likes of which only President Clinton could match. Why would Bollinger send his henchmen to arrest and drag us off to the clink in front of cameras, only to watch the footage on the national news the same night? The man isn't stupid. He knows that every campus issue is fought in the arena of public opinion. When he convinced the world that the students taking action against his administration were his heroes, he ruined the media's story of confrontation and conflict, two key elements needed for any successful student action. Bollinger's reaction to the sit-in was not proof that he has love for university students. It was not proof that his administration looks favorably upon the political activism of students. His behavior was the implementation of a strategy intended to quell the drama and prevent his grand reputation from being tarnished in the national media. When *The N.Y. Times* and *Time* magazine come to your campus, what other choice does an administrator have?

Bollinger presents himself as an anomaly among traditional administrators.

During the 51-hour sit-in I learned that our President will give students the wink-and-a-smile, but when the administrative wheels begin to turn, it's business as usual. As part of SOLE's bargaining committee I sat face-to-face with Bollinger and the University's head lawyer, Marvin Krislov, to hammer out an agreement on how the University would end its shameful participation in the practice of sweatshop labor. Our "negotiations" with Bollinger's administration were entirely two-faced. In private meetings and statements to the media, Bollinger declared that he cared about students and was willing to work with us to form a mutually agreeable University Code of Conduct to end the use of sweatshop labor in the production of Michigan apparel. Yet, after a single meeting where SOLE spent a painstaking two hours to explain the issue to our President, he unilaterally released the University's "official" Code of Conduct less than 24 hours later, without hearing even a word from "his heroes," the students who gave up three days of their lives because this issue meant so much to them.

When we ran down to the plush Regents' room to confront Bollinger about his dishonesty, he took us to something resembling a storage room in the basement of the Fleming building. After sitting back in his chair with a solemn look on his face while four of us grilled him about negotiating in bad faith, we sat in silence for a moment. I think he wanted us to sit there in wonder, realizing that we had spent five minutes scolding the President of the University of Michigan. Bollinger's only defense was that he had been under an indescribable amount of pressure on campus and in the national media (despite the fact that only a day earlier he said that we could occupy his office for weeks and it would change nothing).

Then, a very strange and perhaps unprecedented thing happened; students received a straight answer from administration. I'll do my best to reflect his exact wording. Bollinger told us that at the beginning of the sit-in, we, the students, looked good and he was "in the box" (I'll leave it to you to interpret what exactly the term "in the box" means). After releasing the Code of Conduct at the Regents' meeting, he, Bollinger, looked good and we, the students, were now "in the box." To be honest, we were dumbfounded; not by Bollinger's actions, but by his admission that it was all a public-relations game. But the moment wasn't over. Bollinger actually attempted to become our advisor, recommending that we leave Fleming that night and declare the recently released University code a victory. Granted, the Code of Conduct Bollinger issued to the Regents was much improved from the "final offer" offered by Marvin Krislov before the sit-in. However, the fact that Bollinger released the Code behind our back to shove us "in the box," then tried to reach that caring hand out to help us out of our P.R. predicament was, put simply, disgusting.

I want to offer two brief messages; one to President Bollinger, the other to students.

President Bollinger, you have stated on numerous occasions that you care deeply about the sweatshop labor issue. You knew very little about the negative aspects of the Code of Conduct the administration had planned to release before being educated by students during the sit-in. During our last meeting you demonstrated the same level of ignorance in regard to the White House AIP-FLA code. President Bollinger, this Code holds the potential to defeat the entire anti-sweatshop movement. It gives all the power of monitoring and disclosure to the companies profiting from the perpetuation of sweatshop labor. It also allows companies to declare that they are sweatshop-free because they operate under the White House code which, in effect, does nothing to end the international violation of human rights. There is a reason hundreds of corporations are jumping on the FLA bandwagon every day.

Students, we cannot stand by and assume that ANY administrator has our best interests at heart. Regardless of what they say, administration is administration. In the 60s, student movements and activism ignited because there was a clear distinction between the ideology of students and administration. Today, administrators follow "Clintonite politics," creating apathy and warm fuzzy feelings by aligning themselves with every social-justice issue students advocate. The most dangerous administration is not the one that creates an adversarial relationship between itself and the students, but the one that always claims to be listening and sympathetic and willing to take care of all of the concerns raised by students, then falls far short of addressing those concerns. This strategy undermines student support and creates an ineffective, inactive student body.

Don't be wooed by the expressed sentiment of administration. It is essential that students take the lead in all issues of social justice.

--Trevor Gardner



Tues 3/16 9pm: Final planning meeting ... we confirm decision to sit-in at the President's office ... Plans A and B outlined for the next day's takeover

Tues 3/16 3am: Meijer run for food for the week (includes 42 bags of bagels, 8 tubs of peanut butter and 8 giant sticks of beef jerky)

Wed 3/17 8:30am: We assemble at protester's apartment ... hide supplies by stuffing them into bookbags

Wed 3/17 9:30am: We gather at previously determined meeting place ... when we get the "All Clear" signal from our Outside Coordinator, we sprint to the Fleming Administration Building, **race** up the stairs and **storm** the President's office. Fred, the New York Times photographer, joins us as we **seize** the office.



HOUR 1: We gather breathlessly, begin chanting, and present our demands ... the press calls begin

HOUR 2: We settle in ... break out the cards and homework. The print and radio press arrive, including *The New York Times*, Detroit papers (but we refuse to talk to them—scab papers), *The Ann Arbor News*, *Agenda* and *The Michigan Daily*

HOUR 7: After only three hours to plan, the outside support organize a rally to show that "IT'S NOT JUST THIRTY STUDENTS." The first orange armbands are distributed ... as we press our noses to the window we see over 100 supporters gathering outside to show their support

HOUR 7.25: Hungry and sick of peanut butter, we chant over the walkie-talkie: "What do we want?" "PIZZA!" "When do we want it?" "NOW!"



The No-Sweat 30's Statement Ending the Sit-In

After months of student pressure through educational events, rallies and direct action such as the past 51 HOURS—the University of Michigan has now committed itself to the strongest anti-sweatshop policy of any university and this is ONLY because of the continued commitment of students.

It is because of the students, the policy now includes an anti-sweatshop advisory board where students are equally represented. Students remain the only voice in this fight that is not tainted by corporate greed.

It is because of the students, the policy now includes full public disclosure which means that companies can no longer hide their sweatshops from the rest of the world.

It is because of the students, the policy now includes full protection of women's rights, including full reproductive freedom. This is especially important because women comprise 90% of sweatshop labor worldwide.

It is because of the students, the policy now includes a commitment to implementing a wage that will meet people's basic needs, which the University has until now failed to support.

Students of the University of Michigan are not in this fight alone. We are part of a national student movement that began with successful sit-ins at Duke, Georgetown, and Wisconsin. This movement is now exploding across the country as students demand that their administrations take decisive action on this issue.

But the fight is not over. Sweatshops will not end with this policy. While we have won everything we could through our sit-in, there is still much work to do. At this time the administration refuses to accept a time line for requiring a wage that meets people's basic needs.

How much longer do these people have to wait?

We are here to tell the University that justice delayed is justice denied.

Despite the underhanded and co-optive methods that the corporations and the University have often employed, students and workers united will prevail!

This is not a final agreement, we accept it only as a down payment.

The University is on the brink of signing onto a code without the support of labor, religious groups, students or even the workers of these factories.

This code, the AIP-FLA, is a joke. It allows the industry to police itself: it's a classic case of the fox guarding the hen house.

We cannot allow the University to sign the AIP-FLA code. We must keep up the pressure so that President Bollinger does not endorse a code that has no intention of ending sweatshops.

Let this be a warning to the president: if necessary we will be back. And with your help, we will be back in even greater numbers!



HOUR 7.5: Our supporters send us our first batch of pizzas

HOUR 10: Seven member negotiating team is led to a basement room ("the dungeon") where they wait to meet with the President and his chief general counsel, Krislov.

President Bollinger: **"I WILL NOT CAPITULATE TO STUDENTS"**

HOUR 12: We meet to plan for Day 2—to disrupt Bollinger's office and keep secretaries out ...

HOUR 15: Dance Party! The first time hip-hop and funk are ever heard in Bollinger's office ... give night security guards food and they are our chaperones

HOUR 17: Christen Bollinger's office with



**We'll rant, we'll rage!
Until we get a living wage!**

"SOLE HQ" sign ... we rename Bollinger's secretaries "Caesar Chavez", "Helen Keller", "Paul Robeson" ...

HOUR 23: We wake to the bright lights of the camera crews as all major networks want the scoop on our first night on the president's floor

HOUR 24: Lie down four or five at a time at each entrance to keep the secretaries out ... someone gets stepped on by a high-heel shoe

HOUR 25: Krislov's secretary drops off policy offer from administration: begin to discuss and review ... are impressed by the strength of the new language of the section regarding worker compensation ...

HOUR 27: We are shocked that the administration had announced their anti-sweatshop policy at the Regent's meeting that morning while we were so close to a final agreement

HOUR 29: Second rally ... we hear the chants through the window ... more negotiation with administration ...

HOUR 29.5: Vegan pizza, Chinese food, fried chicken, soda, and cake arrive

HOUR 39: We perform skits of the day's discussion with the administration, draft press releases, communicate with media

HOUR 48: Homemade breakfast brought to us—Vegan pancakes (blueberry and apple), eggs and potatoes, compliments of two co-ops

HOUR 49: *Time*-magazine reporter and photographer meet with us ... we begin to clean/pack up ... we prepare for our exit

HOUR 51: We emerge from the Fleming Building chanting ... we are embraced by the sunshine, cheers of our supporters, and swarms of press. With a press conference and rally, we acknowledge our supporters and the work we still need to do



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**BOLLINGER CAPITULATES
TO STUDENT DEMANDS!**

(Brought to you by Students Organizing for Labor and Economic Equality, or SOLE)



Frequently Asked Questions

"I'm concerned about the human rights abuses of Nike and other corporations, but I like Nike—should I still buy their merchandise?"

Anti-sweatshop and human rights organizations do not call for a boycott, since economically, boycotts end up hurting the workers in the end. Instead, we call for consumer responsibility. The women, men, and children who work in sweatshops often have no voice—they are silenced by both their oppressive working conditions and their governments. We as conscientious and informed consumers have a responsibility to advocate for their rights, demanding that corporations take a stand against widespread labor abuses.

"But aren't sweatshops better than nothing? If these factories didn't exist, wouldn't workers be unemployed and in worse situations?"

Yes, and this is precisely why we do not endorse a boycott. These factories are one of the few sources of income for workers, but while any job is better than no job at all, a good one is undoubtedly better than a bad one. The fact that corporations provide people with an income is not an excuse to lower human rights standards.

"Where are the factories?"

Sweatshops proliferate in Latin America, Southeast Asia, New York City, Los Angeles, and many other major cities in the U.S.

"I want to take a stand and be a part of the movement to end sweatshop labor. What can I do to help?"

Taking a pro-active role as a consumer is one of the most important things that can be done. As customers, we are in a position to have our voices heard. Efforts to end sweatshops are supported by many human-rights and labor organizations. Here is a list of three of the leaders in the movement to end sweatshop abuses; contact them for more information:

- * Global Exchange, 2017 Mission Street #303, San Francisco, CA 94110, 415-255-7296, www.globalexchange.org
- * UNITE—The Union of Needletrades, Industrial, and Textile Employees—www.uniteunion.org
- * United Students Against Sweatshops, 1-800-23UNITE, Exts. 204 or 205, http://home.sprintmail.com/~jeffnkari/USAS/

SOLE is active in continuing the anti-sweatshop movement at the University of Michigan. Because the U-M sells more licensed University apparel than any other school in the country, we are in a unique and influential position to demand that our administration take action.

What's Next?/What You Can Do

Although the University of Michigan has agreed to full public disclosure of factories, a living wage, independent monitoring, women's rights and many other fundamental human rights, President Bollinger has suggested that the University may join the Fair Labor Association (FLA).

The FLA is a part of the Apparel Industry Partnership, a code of conduct that corporations and the White House approved last November without the support of labor unions, human rights groups, religious leaders, and even politicians like congresswoman Marcy Kaptur (D-Toledo).

The FLA is fundamentally flawed for a number of reasons. It does not include public disclosure, a living wage or independent monitoring, the three most important components of a code that would end sweatshop labor.

Under the stipulations of the FLA:

- * Companies choose their own monitors and decide which factories will be inspected.
- * Neither consumers nor universities have public access to monitoring information.
- * Corporations have advanced notice for factory inspections.
- * A company is only required to have 10% of its factories inspected each year.
- * Various women's rights are omitted such as reproductive health rights.
- * Universities and colleges lack independence from corporate influences.

Call or write the University of Michigan administration and tell U-M not to join the FLA. Joining the FLA would be 10 steps in the wrong direction. The workers in sweatshops deserve more than a code that will allow companies to say their garments are sweat-free when in reality conditions would not change at all.

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People
over
Profits

I think it was a huge victory for all parties involved; first of all, for the workers of the factories, hopefully ours and other agreements will markedly improve their situation, second, I think it was a victory for the anti-sweatshop movement in general in that it will seem to university administrators across the country that it was an administration that took the initiative on this issue and hopefully they won't be reluctant to do the same, and third, I think it was a victory for students because the students involved in this issue know the truth about who initiated and constructed this new policy (students) and that should encourage them to fight for justice and democracy at their university and throughout the world.

—Chris Hawke



I work in the office which handles all the faculty governance committees—they basically try to look out for faculty and make sure the administration isn't screwing anyone over. They're always trying to get resolutions passed and such. I guess they've been working formally with the administration for TWO YEARS on one particular thing. One of the people on the committee because you all got what you wanted in two days, but they've been waiting two YEARS to have their resolution passed. The person I'm talking about said he was going to bring that up to the administration—that more students can be heard in a short period of time, but PROFESSORS are told to wait. So you all have created a stir not just on the issue of sweatshops, but in places at least I didn't expect. :)

—Shannon Saksewski